

A Study of Satirical Elements in Jonathan Swift's The Battle of the Books

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Abstract— This article mainly focuses on satirical elements of Jonathan Swift's *The Battle of the Books* which is comprised of five clearly distinguishable incidents. The main body of the satire is however preceded by the Bookseller's notice to the reader and a very brief preface. The first of the five incidents that form the main body of the satire concerns the dispute between the ancients and the moderns for the rights to live on the highest peak of Parnassus. Before the actual dispute of warfare goes on among the dogs of the street. After having thus established want and lust as the main causes of quarrels, the satirist turns to disputes between the inhabitants of the moderns live on a lower peak. They cannot raise high through their own efforts and cannot see ancients enjoying a superior position. Jealousy and heart burning lie at the bottom of their hostile attitude towards the superior beings.

Keywords— Jonathan Swift, Satirical Elements, *The Battle of the Books*.

I. INTRODUCTION

An emissary is sent up to the ancient to surrender the top peak to the moderns. Soon the controversy takes a serious turn when the animated books of St. James's library take up the argument. Haunted as they are by most disorderly spirits, the controversial books of the library soon organize themselves into mutually hostile camps. "The Battle of the Books was on Swift's part the forcing of a personal issue. His patron had been attacked, so he chose to believe, by two unmannerly pedants, William Wotton and Richard Bentley." (Davis 89)

On one side is Plato, Homer and other ancients and on the other side is a host of writers. The unfriendly attitude of the librarian Bentley towards the ancients does much to foment the trouble the plants the ancients individually among a host of moderns causing inconvenience. The news that the moderns are planning to open a hostile in front of the ancients leaks out and the ancients on their part decide to take all necessary measures to protect themselves. Though few in numbers of their better

organization and superior humor put them in a position of vantage.

The economic satiric efficacy:

The second incident concerns the episode of the spider and the bee which is remarkable for its artistic economy and satiric efficacy. When the quarrel is going on in the library, a material incidents falls out upon the highest corner of a large window where there dwelt a certain spider who had destructed number of flies whose spoils lay scattered before the Gates of his palace like human Bones before the cave of some Giant. As it happens a bee unknowingly blunders into the spider's web. Though the bee manages to escape it breaks the web while coming out. The spider within feeling the terrible convulsion supposed at first that nature was approaching to her final dissolution orals that Beelzebub, whom this enemy had slain and devoured.

The infuriated spider pours scorn upon the bee calls his name and levels many accusations against him and the chief midst them is spider to create its own habitation while the bee depends upon flowers and nature to provide with food. To this charge the bee gives a fitting reply that collect thence enriches myself, without the least injury to their beauty, their smell or their taste the spider's web is no more than a store of dirt enriched by sweepings exhaled from below. The Allegorical significance is made explicit of the moderns. The two parties decided to make a trail of strength, an account of the heroes and leading warriors on either become a necessity on the side of the ancients' luminaries as Horner, Pinder, Virgil, Herodotus, Lucan, Euclid, Plato, Aristotle and Temple. The moderns are supported by Tasso, Dryden, Whithers, Cowley, Descartes, Harvey, Denham and a host of others. The single combat is unevenly balanced and in spite of the author's profession of impartiality his sympathy for the cause of the moderns cannot be missed. The names mentioned on the side of moderns are minor figures and no match for the ancients which symbolizes his power as an epic poet and without much effort slays no less than five moderns one after another.

Important views:

The most interesting encounter takes place between Virgil and Dryden. Virgil appears on the scene riding a mottled horse his shining humor completely fitted to his body. Just when the two warriors are about to clash, the modern desires a meeting and on lifting up his helmet, he is recognized as the renowned Dryden. Swift describes the disappointment of Virgil. The satiric implication is that though Dryden tried his hand at heroic verse but his capacity was not equal to the task, the heroic mound ill-suited his genius. Dryden is unwilling to have a trial of strength with Virgil, calls him father and humbly proposes an exchange of humor, a sign of amity, misled Virgil accepts to exchange his golden humor with the rusty one of Dryden. The fourth one falls in the middle of the third, just after the marshalling of the rival forces and before the commencement of the actual battle.

This scene takes place at Milky Way where the gods have assembled to hear from Jupiter about the controversy going on in library Momus. The patron of the moderns, make an excellent speech to support the cause of his devotees. The ancients are well served by Pallas. The Assembly being so violently divided into its opinion, Jupiter commands mercury to bring him the book of fate to know beforehand the outcome of the battle. He reads the decree silently and refuses to divulge it to others. This worries Momus, who is apprehensive of the fate. His meeting with criticism, a hideous looking goddess and appeal to interfere in the war in favor of the moderns is described in a language cluttered with nauseous images which cause revulsion and by association arouse disgust for the moderns.

Swift uses bee as a symbol for the ancients from Temples' Essay on poetry and the spider is identified with moderns. The spider who collects nothing but dirt and position and who boasts of not drawing upon the resources of nature to make his edifice but spins out of himself is typical of the moderns who indulge in vain boast and produce undisciplined writings with no reference to outside standards. On the other hand the bee who has to exercise judgment in choosing the flower, uses his art in extracting honey and labor hard to separate the wax, thus giving sweetness and light to the world, stands for the Ancients. When two armies actually start to clash Swift uses another allegorical narrative. The epic writers lead the ancients and ride on horses. The philosophical nature of Plato's and Aristotle's writing is suggested by making them bowmen who shoot their arrows in the air.

The inconsequential nature of the army of the moderns is suggested by describing most of their troops as mercenaries,

here is his amusing description of the moderns. The rest is a confused multitude, led by scouts, Aquinas and Bellarmine, of mighty bulk and stature but without either arms courage or discipline. In the last place came infinite swarms of calones a disorderly rout led by Estrange, rogues and ragamuffins that follow the camp for nothing but the plunder, all without coats to cover them. The last phrase all without coats to cover them is an allegorical way of referring to cheap pamphlets which had no hard covers on them. The superiority of the ancients over the moderns is suggested by giving them the palm of victory in each one of the combats. The Battle of the Books is a mock-heroic writing since writer draws upon the epic conventions used by Homer, Virgil and other epic writers to describe a petty literary squabble, it is a remarkable blend of wit, Humor, burlesque and satiric ingenuity. The satirical genius of Swift is also evidence in the very effective and proper use of another epic tradition, namely the ability of the supernatural characters to change their shapes and to assume false identity to suit their purpose.

They can also transform the dead body of a warrior into a star or swan or any other suitable phenomena when Aesop assumed the shape of an ass in order to appear as a modern and thus avoid their wrath, it is a very subtle dig at the moderns. The episode is more than a mere imitation of epic tradition. Similarly, when Cowley and Pindar are engaged in a combat and the former is killed latter, his torn body is washed by Venus in ambrosia and turned into a dove. "The Battle of the Books is fired by an anger still aimed at a special object at certain forms of intellectual ambition and error." (Willey 77) Swift had certain respect for Cowley and he resolves the embassies situation by showing the transformation of Cowley's soul.

The librarian is shown as picking worn out of the school men and swallowing then fresh and fasting with the result that his internals are agitated and create confusion in the library. Satire in Swift exists on two levels the overt and implied. The pedantry, pride and the pretentious nature of the moderns are satirized as our horses are of our own breeding, our arms are of our own forging and our clothes are of our own cutting and sewing. The episode of the spider they too spin their edifice out of themselves but then like him they have nothing but dirt and poison in their breasts. To be effective Swift uses various satiric devices to make the whole thing appear as work of a detached viewer. The very title, a metaphor provides a broad base of a phenomenon in human affairs. The reader is put in a position of vantage as he watches the fight in company of the aerial viewer the patterns and the outlines interest him more than the details of the arena. Richard Bentley seemed to have

struck a final blow to Temple's Essay by providing one of the details spurious. But Swift does not touch this point the assumed the authenticity of the epistles and his assumed point of view makes the warring moderns appear misguided and vain.

Author importance:

The historian of The Battle for this is the role assumed by the author more than one creates the illusion of being just and impartial. Through he wrote The Battle mainly to defend his patron, the stand he takes in the satire is consistent with the whole bent of his taste and opinions. He was unduly skeptical of modern learning and knowledge and regarded the tall claims made on behalf of new sciences and literature as presumptuous. Some critics have taken pains to prove that Swift's battle is an allegorical representation of Sir William Temple's Essay but there is not much substance in this claim. "The Battle of the Books is perhaps the least interesting as well as the least characteristic, of Swift's longer satires... It has an air of real detachment of A Modest proposal- which is unusual in him." (Johnson 89)

II. CONCLUSION

It is obvious to say critical mind that since the essay and its contents were the target of Bentley and Wotton its allegorical version would in no way have redeemed Temple's position. Swift does take the line adopted by Temple, but what makes The Battle of the Books a great satire is its author's masterly handling of the various satiric devices employed. Swift seeks to define his patron not by offering arguments and illustrations on his behalf but by his divesting use of irony, allegory, dramatic mask and mock-heroic technique to reduce the opponents to contemptible creatures. The whole narrative is enliven with wit and humor and a certain youthful insolence. But the existence of common names in the marks of two men does not necessarily mean that The Battle was no more than ancients and moderns but it is an allegorical version of the essay.

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